

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 11, 2015

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Office of the Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

On August 5th, the work conducted by EPA at the Gold King Mine led to the release of approximately 3 million gallons of contaminated water and sediment into Cement Creek and the Animas River in southwest Colorado. Reports indicate that the mine is still leaking contaminated water and sediment into the river. Additionally, the toxic stream has now expanded across New Mexico and into Utah.

We write to request that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) establish and publicly disclose its plan for the near-term cleanup and mitigation of the Gold King Mine release. We believe a full emergency response team needs to be on the ground in Durango with adequate funding and staffing to respond to this disaster. In addition, we request that the EPA release a long-term plan to ensure full economic and environmental recovery of the affected area.

The cleanup and mitigation plan should include information on what short and long term water quality tests the EPA will conduct on the Animas River and surrounding watersheds, how often samples will be taken, and when the fully-interpreted, toxicologically-relevant results will be released to the public. These water quality test results need to be publicized and include information on the effects on humans, wildlife, and livestock as well as municipal water supplies and agricultural users. In addition, in the long-term, the EPA needs to complete a risk assessment regarding the possibility of future mine blowouts and a plan for handling such a spill if it occurs.

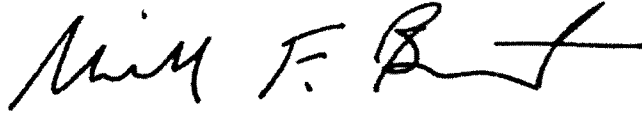
Even though EPA has announced a claims process for compensating citizens who suffer injury or property damage, the EPA should ensure that such compensation also includes assistance to individuals, local businesses, and agricultural producers who have lost significant revenue or taken significant losses due to this tragedy. This should include a system for state, tribal, county, and city officials to seek reimbursement for expenditures they have incurred as the result of the toxic release. Finally, EPA should commit to covering costs sustained by non-profits who have conducted water quality sampling and other services related to mitigating this disaster.

The Animas River is the lifeblood and economic driver of La Plata and San Juan Counties. We would appreciate your agency providing all of the resources possible so that the affected communities can begin to recover.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Michael Bennet
United States Senator



Scott Tipton
Member of Congress